

*Telling*  
*the* **Truth**  
*and* **Nothing But**

*National Summit to Fight*  
**PLAGIARISM &  
FABRICATION**

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More information about the National Summit to Fight Plagiarism & Fabrication can be found on the American Copy Editors Society website at: [www.copydesk.org/plagiarism/](http://www.copydesk.org/plagiarism/).

## 1

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# Hearing *the* Call

**T**HE IMPETUS for this project was a column that appeared on the Poynter Institute’s website in September 2012. In it, Craig Silverman deplored a “cavalcade of plagiarism, fabrication and unethical recycling” during the previous few months, a period he described as journalism’s “**Summer of Sin.**”

Silverman urged the major journalism organizations to “gather what material and policies they have and determine what guidance they can offer to newsrooms.” The ultimate result of that effort, he wrote,

*“would be clear guidelines for plagiarism and fabrication and a consistent process for investigating and communicating about these incidents internally and externally.”*

Teresa Schmedding, the president of the American Copy Editors Society, responded to that call by urging the lead-

ers of other organizations to nominate members of a task force to begin the campaign that Silverman envisioned. She proposed a “summit” meeting at her organization’s annual conference in April 2013 to discuss the findings and recommendations of the task force.

Within a month of Silverman’s challenge, planning had begun under the direction of William G. Connolly, a retired *New York Times* editor and a longtime member of the ACES executive committee. A doctoral dissertation on plagiarism by Norman P. Lewis, an assistant professor at the University of Florida, became the starting point for the inquiry, and Lewis was drafted as an adviser to the task force.

Starting with a conference call on Nov. 26, 23 volunteers representing 10 professional organizations formed themselves into three committees un-

der the leadership of Henry Fuhrmann, an assistant managing editor of *The Los Angeles Times*; Bob Heisse, executive editor of *The State Journal-Register* in Springfield, Ill.; and Nancy A. Sharkey, a professor of practice in the School of Journalism at the University of Arizona.

Vital support for the project was provided by the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation and the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

The text that follows is the product of those investments and the work

they helped finance. Words or passages in bold indicate links to web pages. To see the links, which are collected in the “Sources” pages, touch or click on **SHOW SOURCES** at the bottom of the page. To return to the text, touch or click on the page number to the left of the link.

This study is not very long and certainly not scholarly. Our hope is that it’s sufficiently provocative and practical to prompt in every newsroom in every medium a habit of asking a question that’s been grunted by generations of grizzled editors: “Says who?” ♦

## Participating Organizations

The following organizations have lent support to the project.

### Journalism groups

American Copy Editors Society  
 Associated Press Media Editors  
 American Society of News Editors  
 Canadian Association of Journalists  
 College Media Association  
 Journalism and Womens Symposium  
 Local Independent Online News Publishers  
 Online News Association  
 Radio, Television, Digital News Association  
 Society of Professional Journalists

### Companies

AOL, Inc.  
 The Chicago Tribune  
 Daily Herald Media Group  
 The Dallas Morning News  
 Digital First Media  
 The Los Angeles Times  
 KOMU-TV  
 Morris Communications  
 National Public Radio  
 The Omaha World-Herald  
 The State Journal-Register  
 TucsonSentinel.com  
 WGCU Public Media  
 Yahoo News

### Institutions

Doane College  
 Media Law Center for Ethics and Access, Kent State University  
 The Poynter Institute  
 Scripps Howard First Amendment Center, University of Kentucky  
 University of Arizona  
 University of Florida  
 University of Kansas  
 University of Massachusetts  
 University of Missouri  
 Special thanks to the Reynolds Journalism Institute for producing this e-book. Visit: [www.rjionline.org/newsbooks](http://www.rjionline.org/newsbooks)

## 2

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# Defining *the* Problem

**P**LAGIARISM is presenting someone else's language or work as your own. Whether it is deliberate or the result of carelessness, such appropriation should be considered unacceptable because it hides the sources of information from the audience. Every act of plagiarism betrays the public's trust, violates the creator of the original material and diminishes the offender, our craft and our industry.

The best way to avoid plagiarism is to attribute information, a practice available in any medium. Credit should be given for information that is not common knowledge: facts, theories, opinions, statistics, photos, videos, graphics, drawings, quotations or original word-

ing first produced by someone else.

Journalists must know how legal concepts such as copyright, fair use and trademarks apply to the profession. But they must go beyond minimum legal requirements to serve the public interest and treat creators fairly. Although one cannot legally protect an idea — only its specific expression in a tangible medium is subject to copyright protection — journalists should attribute the original, distinctive or seminal ideas of others when the ideas form a substantial basis for their own work.

With all of this in mind, we affirm a golden rule of attribution: Principled professionals credit the work of others, treating others as they would like to be treated themselves.

We believe that principled news organizations develop and enforce internal standards regarding plagiarism, attribution and fabrication. They make clear to their staffs that transgressions are unacceptable. They nurture a culture of truth-telling by spelling out the rules; by providing mandatory and continual training to prevent infractions; and by dealing with transgressions forthrightly, firmly and fairly. The results are accuracy, honesty, transparency, informed audiences and better journalism.

Journalism itself is founded on the public's right to know about our wider society, its institutions and its leaders. To extend this idea, the public that consumes our journalism has a right to know how we do our work, where we gathered our information, how we know what we know; that we are telling them, to the best of our ability, the whole truth and nothing but.

## The solution: attribution

In attempting to define plagiarism, we started with the presumption that we would have to couple the problem to

the solution: attribution. In doing so, we drew upon the research of **Norman Lewis** of the University of Florida, whose authoritative doctoral dissertation on newspaper plagiarism provided an intellectual guidepost, and on the editorial policies of numerous newsrooms and news associations. A close reading of our thoughts will therefore reveal echoes of the work of fellow journalists, notably those who crafted the standards in place at *The Seattle Times* and **National Public Radio**, among others, and the guidelines advocated by the **Radio Television Digital News Association** and other respected industry organizations.

As a group of professionals drawn from the print, broadcast and digital worlds, from newsrooms and classrooms, from individual organizations and industry associations, we decided at the outset that our definition must apply to any medium in which journalists work. After all, few news organizations these days produce only a single product. Newspapers and magazines publish websites and apps, attracting more readers digitally than they could ever reach in print. Broadcasters

We maintain that online, as in all other media, respect for the work of others through clear, appropriate attribution is the best method to uphold the principles we value.

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are similarly using new media to extend their already wide reach. Digital news sites employ video, audio and other tools, showing the way for more traditional media. All of this is linked by social media, which bring our readers, viewers, listeners and users more directly under our journalistic tent. As the industry continues its deep immersion in new media, crossing from platform to platform, it makes sense for journalists to carry their standards with them.

Although the tools of the trade differ by medium — and the means of proper attribution differ accordingly — we believe that it is essential to assert the same principled standards and approaches for operating on different platforms. We recognize that broadcasting presents special challenges because of long-held traditions, the

hyper-competitive nature of the marketplace and the very real constraints of air time. We nevertheless challenge that vital segment of the industry to embrace a stronger standard for attribution.

While online news sites employ the familiar forms of text, images, audio and video mixed with reporting techniques available only in digital media, the ease with which material may be copied and the speed of innovation create their own tests of professional standards. We maintain that online, as in all other media, respect for the work of others through clear, appropriate attribution is the best method to uphold the principles we value.

Attribution is both a professional responsibility and a good business practice. Online readers, for example, have indicated that they find reporting

containing links to be more authoritative. In an era when media institutions are suspect, heeding the ethic of transparency on all platforms reinforces the position of professional journalists as credible sources of information. Moreover, clear attribution may challenge journalists to do better and deeper work, help stem the rapid spread of error in breaking-news situations and cultivate collaboration while driving competition.

We broadened our definition of plagiarism to cover the realm of ideas, encouraging practitioners throughout the industry to more generously and forthrightly cite the seminal, distinctive work of others from whom they draw inspiration in creating their own original works.

An unavoidable complication in any discussion of plagiarism is intent. Was the plagiarism deliberate? Was it inadvertent? Any effort to define journalistic standards must, in our view, consider the recipients of the journalism, not just the producers. Plagiarism harms the creator of the original material, our craft, our industry — but just as crucially, it is a violation of the audience's

trust. Whatever the motivation, the outcome is the same: Everyone suffers.

Intent — to the degree that it can be ascertained — should influence how an organization decides to handle transgressions by its journalists. Succeeding chapters in this treatise speak authoritatively to those issues. But it's time to reject an all-too-common defense — “I didn't mean it” — and to focus on education, training and the setting of clear standards. It's time to call plagiarism what it is. It's time to assert strong standards and campaign for their broad acceptance, time to recognize our industry's recent transgressions and reshape the future. There's no time like now.

## Fabrication

Fabrication is often linked to plagiarism but in some ways is its opposite: Whereas plagiarism is using without attribution material produced by someone else and assumed to be factual, fabrication is making up material and publishing it in the guise of truth. Both are acts of deception. Both are wrong, but fabrication is especially egregious.

Journalists are committed to seeking and presenting the truth. Knowingly creating false material or deliberately altering reported material is therefore violating the most fundamental functions of journalism. Regardless of the platform, fabrication destroys the credibility of offending journalists, calling into question the validity of all their previous work.

Journalists should never create sources who don't exist or pretend to quote people they haven't interviewed. They should not pose as eyewitnesses in describing a scene or event they did not see firsthand. They should not alter a quotation to change its meaning or use an answer from one question as the response to another. Datelines should reflect where reporting was done and not suggest falsely that reporters were somewhere they were not.

Although some fine columnists of previous eras created imaginary personas as a literary device, the practice is never acceptable in a news article. Any attempt at re-enactment or character creation — including the creation of composite characters — must be clearly and completely explained to the

audience before it is presented. Sources must occasionally be shielded for their protection, but pseudonyms should not be employed to identify them. A pseudonym amounts to a fabricated name and thus raises the question: What else in this story may be made up?

Images should not be edited or enhanced in a manner that would mislead the reader and convey an untruth. Photo illustrations should be clearly labeled as such. The code of ethics of the **National Press Photographers Association** instructs: “Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic images’ content and context. Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects.”

To put it simply, a journalist should never lie to the audience or be a witting party to the lie of another.

## Broadcasting: A call to action

All journalists would agree that taking someone else's work violates the principles that are the foundation of our industry and our organizations. But to what extent do broadcast journal-

ists commit plagiarism when performing “rewrite” — taking copy from wire services, network feeds or their own newscasts and recasting it to produce a more conversational delivery, add facts from different sources or aid the reading style of a particular anchor?

Broadcast journalists traditionally view the work of their print and digital counterparts as avenues of opportunity. When the day dawns with its fresh reporting cycle, broadcast news desks everywhere begin to look for the next big story. What has happened overnight? What angle has been missed? What event may be coming up that fits the audience demographic? All of these questions are raised as news directors, managing editors and assignment managers aggressively explore metro and community newspapers, online news sites, even other broadcast reports. We recognize this as a common, accepted practice in broadcast journalism.

But monitoring other sources comes with distinct responsibilities. The broadcaster must not give the impression that a story that comes from print or another medium is a creation of its

own, but must give credit in its broadcast to the original author.

In its code of ethics, the **Radio Television Digital News Association** prohibits plagiarism and cautions that professional electronic journalists should not

*“report anything known to be false; manipulate images or sounds in any way that is misleading; plagiarize or present images or sounds that are re-enacted without informing the public.”*

A specific broadcast assignment growing out of the active monitoring of other sources should not merely copy or mirror someone else’s original creation. Whatever the inspiration for a story, it should still generally require checking with sources for new leads and using good sense in assembling the pieces of a puzzle, all with the goal of producing a fresh story that serves the audience.

To that end, we advocate these hard rules regarding broadcasting and plagiarism:

- The physical lifting and broadcasting of someone else’s words, images, audio, video or other work

is always plagiarism and is never ethical behavior.

- When broadcasting what print or other media are reporting, on-air credit is appropriate and links or written acknowledgment of original sources should be included in the online versions of broadcast pieces. But giving credit should not be construed as a free pass for the verbatim lifting of copy from those original stories.
- An exception to crediting stories from other news sources may exist for those distributed through network, syndication or wire service feeds that are contractually intended for use, either verbatim or for rewrite, without credit. For example, television and radio network-feed services are available to stations by paid subscription to use at will in newscasts without attribution to the network. Wire services contract with stations in the same fashion.
- Using coverage in other media as a jumping-off point, providing ideas for broadcasters' own original re-

porting, does not run afoul of plagiarism restrictions and does not demand the same level of credit as does repeating another's work in a way that does not advance the story.

The key to combating plagiarism in television and radio reporting is a determination to generate original stories, looking for second-day ledes to pieces that may have originated elsewhere and providing clear, complete attribution for work derived from other sources. In light of shrinking newsroom budgets, plagiarism may have to be redefined to take account of former competitors sharing resources and working together to tell stories that serve the public interest.

## Print: More to be done

When Norman Lewis undertook his doctoral study of journalistic plagiarism he confined his research to daily newspapers and their decades-long record of malfeasance. When Craig Silverman challenged the news industry to address the twin plagues of plagiarism and fabrication he documented a “**Summer of**

**Sin,** drawing much of his recent evidence from newspapers and magazines.

Clearly, even in print, with its hallowed traditions and stated aspirations to the highest standards, journalists must do a better job of attributing, crediting and documenting. They must adopt practices that serve the audience and fellow creators alike while providing a first defense against plagiarism.

Journalists might understandably start the conversation with a question: How much information — a word, a phrase, a sentence — can be copied without committing plagiarism? That's the wrong approach. It is more productive to look for reasons to attribute information more often, more clearly, more generously.

As Lewis' research has shown, most instances of plagiarism in print can be classified as "garden variety," the taking of someone else's work by verbatim copying and pasting. Proper attribution would prevent nearly all such cases. Over time, more attribution will lead to less plagiarism. With that in mind, we advocate the following best practices:

***Punctuation, wording, placement.***

The **guidelines on plagiarism** of the

Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University offer clear, direct advice:

*"Quote and attribute: Use the exact words in quotation marks and include who said it or wrote it. Paraphrase and attribute: Use your own words, but still include who said it or wrote it."*

Quotation marks are only part of the answer. Taking a quote from another publication without crediting the source is plagiarism, pure and simple. Similarly, using a quote from a press release without disclosing its source is misleading, suggesting that it came from an interview or that it is the first-hand knowledge of the reporter.

By the same token, vague references such as "reportedly," "sources said" and "according to authorities" are not enough. They do little to inform while giving journalists a false sense that they have fulfilled their obligation to the audience. Attribution should serve to answer questions, not raise them. (And journalists should not exaggerate; a single source is not "sources.")

Context and other narrative concerns will dictate where to place

attribution and how often to use it. The goal in all instances should be to connect the information being cited and the underlying sources as closely and as clearly as possible, with the audience always in mind.

**Using (and reusing) work by others.**

Many publications rely on wire services, syndicates and other outside providers. **The Los Angeles Times' ethics guidelines** offer succinct advice for handling such material: "We conduct our own reporting, but when we rely on the work of others, we credit them. When wire reports are used, we should clearly attribute the source in the narrative." **The Seattle Times goes into greater detail**, covering the melding of multiple wire services, bylining and crediting, and other everyday situations.

The practice of reusing previously published material raises an intriguing question: Can one self-plagiarize? Perhaps a better way to frame the discussion is to consider the term "**recycling material without disclosure**," as discussed in a Poynter Institute post about Jonah Lehrer's serial reuse in *The New Yorker* and *Wired* of material he had previously written for other publi-

cations. By any name, what Lehrer did was wrong: In no case should journalists copy material they have written for previous employers.

And by any name, the copying of one's prior work — either as an individual journalist or as a news organization — calls for common-sense precautions. On the one hand, the practice can be effective. An example is the reuse of previously vetted background language in a running news story that is being updated or followed up frequently over the course of a news cycle or many days. Such material generally would not require attribution.

On the other hand, the older the material the greater are the risks and thus the need for clear attribution: "as the *Journal* reported at the time of his conviction," for example, or "as she told the *Times* while serving her first term." Information from the archives may have become outdated or may have been wrong but never corrected publicly. Publication in the past does not absolve the current user of the need to cross-check facts, draw from multiple sources and otherwise take responsibility for getting things right.

Jonathan Bailey offers a simple credo at his website **Plagiarism Today**: “If attribution can be done, it should be done. It’s not only the right thing to do, but the best for journalism in general.” He makes a further commendable point: “Though there’s no shame in using information from previous reports, journalists need to focus on what they can add to the news. By acknowledging what came before, the focus is put back on what’s new.”

## Online: The wild, wild web

Technology has enabled reporters to produce accurate and timely news online, often in creative ways without the inherent restrictions of other platforms. Technology has also made online plagiarism quick and easy. The lifting of others’ work — including blatant copyright infringement, credited or not — is common. Work in other media has been lifted by websites, and the reporting of digital journalists has likewise been plagiarized, online and otherwise. Neither practice is acceptable.

Like broadcast organizations (and, indeed, most news outlets in any medium),

online news organizations can find inspiration for follow-up reporting in the work of others. But online journalists must accept the same responsibilities as their broadcasting counterparts.

Unique to online journalism is the ease with which work can be copied and distributed. That has spawned the revival of aggregation and curation, techniques that flourished in newspapers of the Revolutionary era, in the broadsheets of the abolitionists and in such early newsmagazines as Luce’s *Time*. Online aggregation is the reposting of another’s work, generally wholesale through automatic scraping or parsing of an RSS feed, without additional reporting. Curation is the individual selection and posting of a portion of another’s work, usually with added material.

While some copying of others’ material may be considered “fair use,” journalists working online should take special care to ensure that they do not infringe another’s copyright. Automatic aggregation, even with attribution, should never cross the boundaries of fair use and professional respect. The reproduction of inappropriately large

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portions of text may discourage a reader from visiting the original work.

Curated work should also be clearly attributed. Curators should strive to go beyond merely reposting another's work, possibly including references to multiple news sources or original reporting, context or commentary.

The advent of user-generated content and work posted by others on social media raises additional issues that can best be met by attribution and respect for copyright. The challenges in verifying such content make transparency in sourcing necessary — not just ethically but practically. Not all crowd-sourced material is credible, but its use by professional journalists implies that it is based in the truth.

Questions of copyright and fair use aside, it is always good practice to identify the work's creator in the clearest possible manner. The use of platform credit alone does not suffice — for

example, sourcing a video clip to YouTube rather than the poster is akin to sourcing a print news story to the press that reproduced it.

Some platforms create further challenges to attribution. On Twitter, for example, another's authorship can be indicated through the use of RT and MT (“retweet” and “modified tweet”) with an @ link to the creator's profile. Other social media sites have similar methods or tools to assist with attribution, such as the “via” sharing option on Facebook.

Indeed, the practices of social media offer lessons in how journalists can do a better job of attribution regardless of medium or technology. If a tweet pecked out on a cellphone can convey proper attribution through an RT, an @ citation and a hyperlink in only 140 characters, there is no excuse for journalists operating with greater freedom in print, online or broadcasting. The simple words “As reported by ...” can go a long way. ♦

## 3

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# Building Barriers

## Who plagiarizes or fabricates?

**L**OGIC MIGHT SUGGEST that amateur writers, specifically bloggers, would be more likely to plagiarize or fabricate than “professionals,” people familiar with the reporting, writing and editing standards that are common in newsrooms and journalism schools. Similarly, it would seem logical to assume that an inexperienced journalist — a student, say — would be more apt to offend than a veteran. And one might assume that journalists in larger newsrooms, who have access to more resources and are subject to more editing scrutiny, would be less likely to offend than their colleagues in smaller operations.

Well, it ain't necessarily so.

Some anecdotal data suggest that plagiarism among inexperienced writers isn't very common, though it may be increasing. “I can say with authority we're seeing more of it ... in various courses and at all levels,” said Jan Leach, an associate journalism professor at Kent State University, director of the university's Media Law Center for Ethics and Access and an ethics fellow at the Poynter Institute. But, she said, she encounters only about one case a year.

Instructors at three universities in Nebraska — Creighton University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the University of Nebraska Omaha —

offered similar estimates on how often they encounter plagiarism or fabrication, ranging from almost never to a few times a year. Several respondents said they'd encountered plagiarism among students only once in their teaching careers.

But the accounts of students themselves indicate that the incidence of plagiarism may be much higher. Norman Lewis of the University of Florida and Bu Zhong, an associate professor of communications at Penn State University, reported in the December 2011 issue of the journal *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator* that 15.6 percent of the 908 university students they polled from 2006 to 2009 admitted to plagiarizing, about half saying they had done it more than once.

Another category of inexperienced writers — classic bloggers, or non-journalists who offer “web logs” of insights, opinions and other information — is not so easily assessed. The iThenticate company, for example, has no solid data on the incidence of the problem among bloggers. Jason Chu, a spokesman for iThenticate's sister company, Turnitin, said the fluid nature of blog-

ging makes it difficult to track for plagiarism. Because blogging “happens on the fly,” Chu said, “it's a challenge to measure that and quantify it.”

Jonathan Bailey, who maintains the site **Plagiarism Today**, says bloggers who actually plagiarize are a “small minority.” He cites spam blogs and people who post in foreign countries as being major offenders, along with those with a presence on social media sites like Tumblr and, formerly, MySpace. Bailey said that bloggers who make the effort to set up professional-looking sites seem much less likely to plagiarize.

And the non-professional sector of the blogosphere can be self-cleansing. The person who blogs in a strong centralized community is not as likely to risk plagiarizing as a stand-alone spam blog, Bailey says. The risk of being caught and shamed for plagiarizing is too great. In that sense, the very small players are like the very biggest online publishers — each has a paramount interest in protecting a reputation or brand.

One of the big publishers, the Huffington Post, deals with accusations of plagiarism from both inside and out-

side, said its executive blog editor, Stuart Whatley — from HuffPost bloggers who perceive that their material has been plagiarized on the outside and from those outside it who see HuffPost bloggers as plagiarizing them. Most of the accusations, Whatley said, concern the ideas expressed rather than precise wording. But the offenses in blind submissions from the outside, he added, are “patch-writing” — feeble paraphrasing — or straight pickups from press releases.

In his 2007 doctoral dissertation, Norman Lewis examined plagiarism among newspaper professionals, and his data seem to suggest that plagiarism occurs more often in larger newsrooms. Thirty-five of the 76 cases he examined were at papers with circulations of more than 250,000. Twenty-four cases occurred at papers with circulations between 100,001 and 250,000. And only seven cases were in newsrooms with circulations of less than 50,000. Moreover, there were 14,974 newsroom staff members in the high-circulation group, 11,414 in the middle group and 20,534 in the smallest category.

Lewis noted, though, that staff members at larger papers are more

likely to be caught in plagiarism studies. Seven of the cases he studied were at *The New York Times*. It’s possible that other newspapers have had proportionately just as many cases of plagiarism, but, Lewis wrote, “it is also likely that *The Times* is more closely watched than any other newspaper in America.” He added: “That *The Times* has the most plagiarism cases in this study is not a reflection of the integrity of its journalists, but a manifestation of the inspection it receives.”

Among the other reasons Lewis cites for the frequency of plagiarism at large papers is competition. Large papers have more competitors than small ones so there is an incentive to attribute less — reporters don’t want to admit that they’ve been scooped.

The offenders Lewis studied included several experienced and respected journalists, two of whom had done Pulitzer Prize-winning work. Forty-four of the 76 journalists had more than 10 years of experience. “In short,” Lewis wrote, “those accused of plagiarism generally are not ignorant rookies or journalistic deadwood.” While these examples don’t demonstrate that an experienced writer

is more or less apt to plagiarize, they do indicate that no amount of experience can rule out the possibility of error.

While fabrication does not seem to have earned as much scholarly attention as plagiarism, anecdotal evidence would suggest that it falls into the same patterns. It happens among young, eager reporters like Janet Cooke, who became infamous in 1980 with the publication of “Jimmy’s World,” a wholly fabricated sensation that made Page 1 of *The Washington Post*. And it happens among seasoned veterans like Karen Jeffrey of *The Cape Cod Times*, who made up scores of people in dozens of stories over 14 years.

## Why do they do it?

In some respects, asking why a person plagiarizes or fabricates is like asking why a child pushes a playmate or why a motorist runs a red light. They know it’s wrong, but they do it anyway. And there’s not always an easy explanation.

The study of college students by Professors Lewis and Zhong elicited a wide range of explanations for its occurrence, among them laziness, being pressed for time, unclear rules and an assignment

that wasn’t worth the time. The fourth most frequent explanation was that the plagiarism was an accident.

Some cases of plagiarism are indeed accidental, and pleading accident is a common defense in professional as well as academic cases: With the flow of work accelerating in daily journalism as staffs shrink, such explanations may seem more plausible, though the offense is no more permissible.

Zachery Kouwe, a 31-year-old business reporter who had been at *The New York Times* for a little more than a year in early 2010, **says his plagiarism** in the paper’s DealBook blog and other sections was accidental. In an account he gave to *The New York Observer*, Kouwe said that the problem arose from a confusion of notes and that he did not knowingly plagiarize. But he resigned soon after his transgressions came to light.

Another journalist with one of the country’s most respected newspapers, William Booth, a *Washington Post* correspondent and bureau chief for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, **plagiarized four sentences** from a professor’s journal article. While neither *The Post* nor Booth described how his

plagiarism occurred, he did not deny it in his apology, saying, “This was not intentional. It was an inadvertent and sloppy mistake.” **Booth was suspended.**

A possible explanation for such cases is the **phenomenon of cryptomnesia**, in which a person’s memories resurface and are believed to be original. “Clearly all of us, referring to journalists, probably appropriate phrases or ideas, on occasion, without realizing it,” said Howard Schneider, Stony Brook University journalism dean and former *Newsday* editor, in a 2009 **article at the *Daily Beast*** about “unconscious plagiarism.”

Some cases, if they aren’t accidental, can be attributed to inexperience. That’s especially true among students. Sherrie Wilson, associate professor in the School of Communication at the University of Nebraska Omaha, said in a recent study, “In introductory writing classes, students often don’t understand what they’re supposed to attribute and how to do it.”

Among professionals, though, pressure is more likely than inexperience to explain plagiarism. In March 2011, Sari Horwitz, a *Washington Post* re-

porter with 27 years of experience and three Pulitzer Prizes, copied lines from two *Arizona Republic* stories within a week. **In her apology**, she said: “Under the pressure of tight deadlines, I did something I have never done in my entire career. I used another newspaper’s work as if it were my own. It was wrong. It was inexcusable.”

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**A column** by *The Post’s* ombudsman, Patrick B. Pexton, sought to provide other reasons for the lapse. Among them: “According to *Post* colleagues, Horwitz was under deadline pressure to file for *The Post’s* Web site, rushing to write between two other scheduled interviews for a longer story. And she had been helping her mother, who still lives in Tucson, with some difficult health issues.” Horwitz was suspended for three months without pay.

Her case seems to mirror that of a writer at the other end of the spectrum. In April 2009, a University of Massachusetts student, Nicole Sobel, plagiarized in a *Daily Collegian* piece from a *New York Times* op-ed article. The blog **NYTPicker** called her out, posting several examples comparing her article with the op-ed piece. Sobel responded with an apology that said in part,

*“I was going through alot and was under alot of pressure with school-work, and copied some of the article from the NY Times, because I didn’t have the time to write alot of my own stuff that day.”*

Stephen Glass, who attracted notice in the late 1990s after it was discovered that he’d fabricated in dozens of articles written for *The New Republic* and other publications, cited another kind of pressure: “I ... felt very powerfully the desire to please my parents, please my editors, and to succeed at this,” he said of his work at *The New Republic* in testimony to the California State Bar Court after he applied to join the bar there. Glass’s parents wanted him to be a doctor, and his family’s home during his youth was described as a “pressure

cooker” in a **2011 CNN article** about his bar application.

## What were they thinking?

In some cases, perhaps the explanation for plagiarism is simply that it’s so easy. There’s never been a medium as friendly and even encouraging to the plagiarist as the Internet.

Among the most infamous cases is that of Jayson Blair, who committed plagiarism and fabrication at *The New York Times*. In a **2012 CBS News report**, Blair discussed his problematic work with Lee Cowan. His first offense, he said, was taking a quote from an Associated Press story without crediting the service. “And a couple of days go by,” he recalled, “and the thought that goes through my head: ‘I can’t believe no one caught that. I can’t believe that no one noticed it.’ But the seed was planted in my head.”

Asked if he thought he’d be caught, Blair replied:

*“You know, it’s kind of the slippery slope that starts to happen. I think once you realize that you can get away with something,*

*once you cross over that line, you somehow have to rationalize how I'm a good person and I did this. So somehow this has to be OK. I've got to make this OK. So then it becomes a lot easier to do it."*

While Blair readily admitted his errors, some writers don't seem to fully own up. Take, for example, Gerald Posner, a journalist writing for the *Daily Beast* in 2010. **He admitted to copying** five sentences from a *Miami Herald* story, but said that he didn't remember seeing the article. "He said he had no memory of having seen the *Herald* story," an article in Slate.com reported, "describing himself as 'absolutely sure' he did not see it before sending his own story to *Beast* editors."

"I am humbled by it, and it will not happen again," Posner said of his plagiarism. He later resigned from the *Daily Beast*. But a *Miami New Times* **article** two months later reported having found 16 more instances of plagiarism in Posner's book work.

*"Mine is not a case like Jayson Blair or Stephen Glass where there was either wholesale copying from others or in some instances fabrication," Posner*

*wrote in his personal blog. "Any sentences copied by me from published sources were never done with the hope or expectation I'd trick others and get away with it."*

And Ralph Taylor, a contractor working for a Georgia school district, produced a 15-page report analyzing the district's alternative education program, **more than a third of which was lifted** from other documents. Taylor, who'd been paid \$10,000, acknowledged his "inexcusable mistake" and said he would return his fee. But he added, "I am not a plagiarist, and plagiarism was not my intent."

If those who plagiarized unintentionally are cause for concern, people who copy on purpose prompt full-blown alarm. Take, for example, the science writer Jonah Lehrer.

In June 2012, a Lehrer piece in *The New Yorker* was **questioned by Jim Romenesko** for its similarity to work Lehrer had done for *The Wall Street Journal* in the previous year. Lehrer had essentially recycled the first three paragraphs of his earlier work. A deeper look into his work, **published on Slate**, examined 18 Lehrer pieces, finding

problems with plagiarism, the accuracy of quotes and a failure to correct errors.

Charles Seife, the New York University journalism professor who examined Lehrer's work, concluded: "In short, I am convinced that Lehrer has a cavalier attitude about truth and falsehood. This shows not only in his attitude toward quotations but in some of the other details of his writing. And a journalist who repeatedly fails to correct errors when they're pointed out is, in my opinion, exhibiting reckless disregard for the truth."

Lehrer resigned from *The New Yorker* and said **in his apology**:

*"The lies are over now. I understand the gravity of my position. I want to apologize to everyone I have let down, especially my editors and readers."*

## Newsroom policies can help

Journalists at *The Cape Cod Times* were stunned when they learned in 2012 that a longtime colleague, Karen Jeffrey, was a serial fabricator. *The Times* **published a front-page apology** explaining that a review of her work had left the paper "unable to find 69 people in 34 stories since 1998."

That revelation set the staff at a sister paper, *The Standard-Times* in New Bedford, Mass., thinking about how they could prevent a similar scandal. "Immediately after the Jeffrey story broke, I asked a team of newsroom professionals and a community member to help us find a way to make sure that nothing like what happened at *The Cape Cod Times* would happen here," **wrote Bob Unger**, the editor and associate publisher of SouthCoast Media Group, the publisher of *The Standard-Times*.

He formed a committee of editors, reporters and a member of the paper's community advisory board. They developed a policy, enacted in January 2013, that set out a new process for source verification.

Under that policy, reporters are required to keep for a month "a record of how to contact all sources mentioned in their stories." Each week an editor randomly selects three reporters or regular freelancers. The editor chooses one article, checks the accuracy of all its quotes, numbers and statistics, then verifies that all of its sources exist. The editor also does a spot check of one story from each of the other selected writers.

With that policy, which was shared with readers in Unger's column, *The Standard-Times* became one of very few news organizations that conduct post-publication checks to weed out fabrication and error. It is also one of the few publications that have invited a member of the community to help develop such a policy.

Just as *The Standard-Times* was announcing its new approach, *The Toronto Star*, Canada's largest-circulation English-language daily, suffered two incidents of plagiarism, one of them involving an op-ed piece submitted by a Toronto public school official. In response, said the public editor, Kathy English, *The Star* bought access to plagiarism-detection software, Poynter's Andrew Beaujon reported.

*The Standard-Times* and *The Star* are unusual in their adoption of policies and technology to help prevent plagiarism and fabrication. Most policies do not outline prevention or disciplinary measures, but they do frequently address plagiarism, if not fabrication, in unmistakable terms. The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, for instance, uses just two words: "Never plagiarize."

That's a clear directive, and it's echoed, albeit at greater length, in other policies. *The Denver Post* puts it this way:

*"Acts of plagiarism or fabrication announce to the world that the writer did not have the honesty, skill, savvy or energy to do the work that someone else performed. Information, quotes and passages from another publication must be attributed."*

*The Seattle Times* policy says:

*"Readers deserve to know where The Times gets the information it publishes. Plagiarism deprives them of that knowledge."*

The ethics policy of the Bay Area News Group in California includes this passage:

*"Employees should not plagiarize, whether it is the wholesale lifting of someone else's writing or the publication of a press release as news without attribution."*

As these examples suggest, newsroom policies are often clear about why plagiarism is wrong and a serious transgression. But they rarely outline prevention programs or policies on sourcing and attribution. Nor do they

offer details about how a news organization will deal with an incident or discipline an offender.

It's also not clear how news organizations educate journalists about proper attribution and sourcing or whether they have an established process for ensuring that newly hired staff members and contributors are aware of the organization's standards and policies.

These blind spots should be addressed because a precise policy that is clearly communicated and strictly enforced is the first step in preventing plagiarism and fabrication. Here are the characteristics of a strong policy:

- ***There's no room for confusion.*** A policy should make clear that plagiarism and fabrication are not acceptable and will be dealt with quickly, regardless of who brings an incident to the attention of the organization.
- ***It's widely available.*** A good policy is a public policy. In making its stance on plagiarism and fabrication clear, a news organization sends a strong message about its values

both to its staff and to its audience. Openness should also prevail when an incident is discovered; it must be dealt with publicly and quickly.

- ***It involves random checks.*** Editors should spot-check reporters' sources randomly either before or after publication. The policy should specify when the checks are to take place, who is responsible for them and how they should be conducted.
- ***It addresses attribution and linking.*** The policy should make the case that linking and other forms of attribution are good journalism. Journalists must be recognized and rewarded for offering credit rather than for taking it from others or being stingy about citing sources. The best policies offer specific guidelines.
- ***It's clear about discipline.*** A policy must be unequivocal in its condemnation of plagiarism and fabrication. It must also make clear that while the severity of a plagiarism offense may be subject to interpretation, fabrication always results in dismissal.

- ***It treats everyone equally.*** A fundamental principle of a good policy is that discipline is applied equally to everyone, regardless of status.

## Other helpful practices

A clear policy is a start. In addition, we strongly recommend that news organizations examine the feasibility of adopting plagiarism-detection software. Beyond that, they should take these steps:

- Require reporters to obtain and keep contact information on all sources and to supply such information for on-the-record sources during random or routine fact-checking.
- Encourage the video or audio recording of on-the-record interviews and, where possible, the photographing of sources.
- Require that reporters discuss unnamed sources with at least one specified editor, providing names and other information that would help the editor confirm that the sources exist and assess their credibility.
- Ask reporters working in digital

media to link to social media profiles, personal websites or other material that will confirm the identity of sources.

- Encourage editors to challenge and check digital material that lacks a documenting link. When an online citation isn't available, public records databases and other sources should be consulted to provide supporting material.

## Changing the culture

Editors and reporters across all platforms are under extreme pressure in a grinding 24-hour news cycle. The competition to match others' reports is more intense than ever, and traditional methods of delivering the news and telling stories have been upended. Many news organizations are struggling to maintain quality and traditional ethical standards while adapting to the new reality.

That reality makes it easier than ever to find and copy someone else's words and present them as your own. But the new order also makes it easier than ever to paste a section of published material into Google and learn

whether it appeared elsewhere under someone else's byline or to check names and other details to verify that a source exists.

Yet plagiarism and fabrication have not abated.

Newsroom leaders must confront that fact. They must make checking for authenticity and originality a standard procedure. They must initiate ongoing discussions — clear, constant conversations about standards, expectations and best practices — that will raise awareness of plagiarism and fabrication. Though the news cycle does not allow much time for reflection on how stories have been handled, newsroom leaders must find the time. This is important work.

Creating a culture that makes those things routine is a daunting task, but it can be done. It's not just a matter of revising policies and technologies. A newsroom's culture is defined by the shared values and beliefs of its staff. With this in mind, newsroom leaders must encourage a culture of transparency in which sources are scrupulously credited and the audience is told where information came from. In such a cul-

ture a lack of attribution or documentation would shine a glaring light on plagiarism and fabrication. A diligent adherence to these values will help restore the trust of news consumers.

Newsroom leaders should encourage conversations about journalism ethics within their staffs and with the community at large. They should conduct regular internal sessions to discuss how the news was gathered and delivered. Leaders must set the tone, but less senior people should be tapped to help facilitate sessions and share insight and questions. In these discussions, editors and reporters should be encouraged to talk frankly about the ethical dilemmas they face, particularly those involving stories that are still being reported. Mistakes should be used as the basis for further discussion.

Newsroom training should emphasize transparency on every platform and include digital story-telling techniques that provide documentation, context and attribution so complete that plagiarism and fabrication would be difficult if not impossible.

Offenses, major and minor, should be dealt with openly. If a story is clearly

not plagiarism but relies on weak or vague attribution (“sources said,” for example, or “according to news reports”) newsroom leaders should deal with the offenders and with the staff at large, underscoring standards and offering retraining if it’s needed.

All journalists, including stringers, community contributors and interns, should be required to sign a statement testifying that they have read and understand the organization’s ethical policies and its standards relating to attribution, plagiarism and fabrication.

## Transparency in a digital world

Journalists should provide **relevant links** in digital stories so that readers and viewers can examine the sources of the information they’re being given. **Links** are a digital form of **attribution**. In newsrooms where they are routinely provided in digital stories, the absence of links is a red flag to editors on the alert for plagiarism and fabrication.

Journalism seeks a popular audience, whatever the platform, and so does not require the detailed attribu-

tion common to academic writing. **Footnotes** would be a distraction to non-academic readers and a layout nightmare to newspaper and magazine editors. Distracting subtitles or disclaimer-like endnotes would create mayhem in broadcasting. And linking fits more comfortably than footnoting into digital content.

But during much of the last decade, many journalists dismissed bloggers (even as they became bloggers) and the linking that was essential to blogging. They saw **linking as a courtesy**, not an essential ethical practice. Besides, adding links took time, and journalists were busy. Moreover, news organizations didn’t want visitors leaving their sites, so many provided links only to their own content rather than to the sources they’d used in reporting.

This mindset ignored the data every news organization had proving that most visitors quickly left their sites anyway. And it ignored the fact that **a business getting billions** of the advertising dollars that were fleeing traditional media — **Google** — built its success on sending visitors away. As Google has shown, people keep coming back to a

site that sends them to links they find interesting. Relevant **links also make content more attractive to search engines**, which are significant contributors to the traffic of most news sites.

But all those business reasons for transparency are overshadowed by the journalistic imperative. We must expand on Jeff Jarvis's principle that news organizations should **do what they do best and link to the rest**.

E-books present special linking challenges because they tend to be read offline on tablets or e-readers. A user who touches or clicks on a link in that situation will be told that the sought-after web page cannot be found. And when touch-screen devices are online, links are often activated inadvertently as users attempt to "turn" pages or perform other functions. Multiple links in a single e-book paragraph can be especially annoying.

One solution to those problems is to gather all the links in one place, as they are gathered here within the "Sources" pages. Throughout the text, words or passages in bold indicate links. To see the links, touch or click on the **SHOW SOURCES** button at the

bottom of the page. To return to the text, touch or click on the page number to the left of the link.

Of course, print and broadcast reports cannot carry links, but nearly every print or broadcast story has a digital version. The print and broadcast versions should include sufficient attribution for those platforms and the digital versions should have thorough links.

Most journalists in traditional newsrooms produce content for print or broadcast, which is then posted to the web. That system makes linking a chore and an afterthought. So changing the culture may require changing the workflow as well as the attitudes and expectations. In a perfect world, journalists would work initially on the digital version of an article, then make the adjustments necessary for print or broadcast.

Media organizations and vendors should work toward that goal, demanding and developing tools that allow journalists to link easily as they work on digital platforms. Newsrooms should encourage the use of web-native tools such as **Storify**, **Spundge** and **Publish2** that make linking simple and seamless.

The links required will vary, but at a

minimum they should point to all digital sources used in the research for the story as well as social profiles or other digital information about key people or organizations mentioned. Time will sometimes limit the extent of linking. A breaking story might link only to the sources used in research, while an enterprise piece should provide more extensive links for context, depth and verification.

While links are the foundation of a transparent culture in a digital world, the attribution effort should not end with them. Journalists who quote tweets or refer to **YouTube** videos should embed that material in their stories. Journalists basing stories on hard-copy documents that can't be linked to should scan them and use a tool such as **Scribd** or **DocumentCloud** to embed them. Where stories are based on data analysis, journalists should make the **data-bases searchable and interactive**. Even in articles that are primarily text, video and audio clips will add credibility. In some cases, unedited audio or video files may be helpful, but editing might be needed to remove off-the-record comments, factually incorrect statements or other inappropriate material.

A common explanation for plagiarism is that the error was inadvertent, that notes became confused. The culprit is often careless cutting and pasting.

Cutting and pasting blocks of text can ensure that a source is quoted accurately, but it's a practice that should be used with great caution. Quoted material should never be pasted into notes or stories without being designated immediately as quotation. One helpful technique is to add quotation marks, the attribution and a link before pasting the text; it then survives as a quote in notes or drafts.

Journalists writing in a content management system that has a block-quote function can paste the quoted material in as a block quote after adding the attribution and link. Another technique is to highlight quoted material (again, with attribution and link) in a distinctive color in notes and drafts.

Journalists can choose any device that works to guard against plagiarism. But they should adopt an effective one because plagiarism is a potentially career-killing offense and sloppiness does not excuse it. "I didn't mean it" is a guilty plea, not an alibi. ♦

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# Responding to Lapses

**D**ETEECTING plagiarism and fabrication begins with a newsroom culture that values attribution, accuracy, transparency and credibility. Communicating newsroom practices and policies regularly is essential to building that culture, in part because it ensures that staff members and contributors not only know the rules but take personal responsibility for them. This may make them more likely to respond appropriately to readers, contributors and viewers who report suspicions of plagiarism or fabrication.

Such reports can come from many sources — a fellow reporter, a reader, listener or viewer, a journalism watchdog, a quoted source or even the offend-

er. When quotes are fabricated, Lewis noted in his research, those quoted or their family members sometimes come forward. If they do, and if the publication has a system in place to follow up on complaints, the fabricator is caught.

Sometimes the victim himself detects plagiarism. *The Hartford Courant* cartoonist Bob Englehart discovered a verbatim copy of his “When Does Life Begin?” cartoon in *The Tulsa World* in 2005, some 24 years after he’d created it, according to Lewis. The offending cartoonist, David Simpson, was eventually dismissed.

One key line of defense against both plagiarism and fabrication lies, not surprisingly, with the copy editor, assigning

Editors should read all the quotations in a story, particularly a roundup or man-on-the-street piece, to see if each feels original, showing some aspect of the speaker's personality.

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editor or news director. What should set off alarm bells? The work might not resonate with the writer's usual voice or style. Or the reporter cannot provide attribution or original documents. He or she files an unusually complete report in less than the usual time, is vague about key sources or is distracted by unrelated life events — a chronically ill parent, say, or a tumultuous divorce.

Editors should read all the quotations in a story, particularly a roundup or man-on-the-street piece, to see if each feels original, showing some aspect of the speaker's personality. A uniform voice in all the quotes should be suspicious. Had editors at *The New York Times* used this standard in examining the quotations from four wounded Iraq War veterans, Jayson Blair may have been unmasked a month and several fabrications earlier.

Editors should weigh details of the story against their own logic and judgment. Had *The Washington Post* editors who handled “Jimmy's World” asked how an 8-year-old truant could be in fourth grade, they could have stopped Janet Cooke's fabrication before it was published. Editors should view with joy — tempered by a gimlet eye — the new contributor with a stunningly original piece of reporting or editorial insight. It is worth asking how the contributor came by such brilliance. Often the “pitch” for the story will cover this, but it's worth a conversation or even an online search.

But the “Jimmy's World” kind of fabrication is extraordinary. Most made-up material comes from serial fabricators who operate undetected for years or decades. So the most reliable way to detect fabrication is to test systematically for the authenticity of sources.

Online tools can help in that process, whether the offense is plagiarism or fabrication. We admired *The Seattle Times Plagiarism/Attribution Guidelines*, developed in 2004 in light of a plagiarism case a year after the Blair fiasco. They say in part:

- Practice what some papers call “skeptical” editing: Ask lots of questions. Know where the reporter got the information. Don’t hesitate to ask to see documents, and make sure references to them are paraphrased and attributed correctly.
- Keep tabs on reporters’ workloads. Find a way to ease the load if necessary.
- Watch for unattributed information in stories that would require a degree of expertise the reporter doesn’t have.
- Educate new reporters and interns on what plagiarism is.
- Be a reader first, and ask yourself what sourcing information would be helpful to readers.
- Work to understand and recognize

the writing style of your reporters. If anything seems like it’s not written in a particular reporter’s “voice,” ask extra questions about where the information came from.

- If something seems amiss, you can run 8- to 12-word phrases from the story through LexisNexis to make sure they haven’t been used elsewhere. (Think of this as a way to guarantee that your reporter’s words are fresh and unique!)

In addition to LexisNexis, copy editors, assigning editors and news directors can run that copy through search engines or choose from a list of websites compiled by Northwest Missouri State University on its page called **Guide to Diagnosing Plagiarism**. Two free detection sites include a link to an open source, Windows-based program called **WCOPYfind**. WCOPYfind’s site says it compares documents and reports similarities in their words and phrases.

Northwest Missouri State lists 14 websites other than Google where an editor can type in phrases and look for copies. LexisNexis has a product

called **Accurint** that says it's a "direct connection to over 34 billion current public records" that can be used to detect fraud, verify identities and conduct investigations. When a *Cape Cod Times* reporter made up a family for a story, *The New York Times* **reported** that her editors used Accurint to determine that the family did not exist. In the end, a full review revealed that the reporter, Karen Jeffrey, had made up 69 people in 34 articles since 1998.

Commercial sites used by academia include Turnitin, Copyscape, PlagScan, Plagium and PlagiarismDetect. They work in similar ways. Turnitin advertises that it provides originality reports "by checking submitted papers against 24+ billion web pages, 250+ million student papers and leading library databases and publications."

And in recent years, a cottage industry of journalism watchdogs has been bent on checking for plagiarism, especially in large newspapers. Among the online watchdogs: the **Media Research Center** website, which says it aims to document, expose and neutralize what it sees as liberal media bias; **Regret the**

**Error**, Craig Silverman's column on tracking accuracy, errors and the craft of verification at the Poynter Institute; **Jim Romenesko**, who covers the media on his blog; and **iMediaEthics** (formerly known as stinkyjournalism.org), which is run by a University of Iowa journalism and mass communications professor whose website says, "We'll call out the media for getting it wrong, but we also want to highlight when the media gets it right." Australia has a television show called "**Media Watch**," which includes plagiarism in its list of coverage topics it has used to expose "media shenanigans" since 1989.

*American Journalism Review* and *Columbia Journalism Review* also critique large papers. Alternative weeklies and city magazines in major cities sometimes find plagiarism in the city's larger paper. And there is the simple fact that readers and viewers, consuming a variety of news sources and social media sites, may notice the same stories with the same interview subjects, then complain about it.

Finally, there are whistleblowers. Anna Tarkov, **writing on Poynter**, re-

ports that it took an honest employee trained in journalistic standards and ethics to blow the whistle on Journatic, an “outsourcing” site that was accused of putting fake bylines on hundreds of stories written by low-paid Philippine employees. The whistleblower, Ryan Smith, called *The Chicago Reader*, which published a story about the practice. Then he contacted PRI’s “**This American Life**.” Smith said on the program that he was editing writers in the Philippines who were told to choose fake bylines from a click-down box. They were paid 35 or 40 cents a story. Poynter’s Julie Moos reported that one of its editorial leaders resigned in July 2012 because of ethical disagreements over how to run the company.

Plagiarism and fabrication are not limited to the written word. But in audio or video it can be difficult to determine whether a reporter has staged a scene, though it may feel contrived, sometimes because the source is an obvious if not very able actor. Though digital manipulation isn’t always so easy to spot, there are ways to detect it. One of the newest products available

is an extension for Adobe Photoshop called **FourMatch**, produced by a company named Fourandsix. The website says it “instantly analyzes any open JPEG image to determine whether it is an untouched original from a digital camera.” FourMatch was created by Dr. Hany Farid, a Dartmouth College computer science professor and a digital image forensics expert, who discussed its uses as well as the problem of digital doctoring with *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Craig Silverman of Poynter, quoting **Farid’s Fourandsix colleague Kevin Connor**, listed other steps that can help disclose visual manipulation:

- Check the file and metadata using what’s called an **EXIF viewer** or a **Firefox add-on** designed for that purpose. The data can reveal the type of camera that took the photo and even the software last used to save the image.
- Check for telltale tool marks, copycat pixels and halos left by the Photoshop clone tool and for distorted shadows, reflections and perspective lines; hoaxsters make mistakes.

## Find the original source of a video or image, if possible. Judge the reliability of the potential contributors as one would any other source or contributor.

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Theresa Collington of Gannett, in a presentation titled “**Detecting Fauxtography**,” suggests also checking the urban legend tracker **Snopes.com**, Googling the photo with “hoax,” looking for feathering, changes in light and soft focus and going with your gut. The only places on the web where photos are certainly safe to use are **www.creativecommons.com** and the Creative Commons section of Flickr. (For photographers who want to keep their work safe from online theft, John D. McHugh, a photojournalist, designed **Marksta**, an app that watermarks photos.)

At Storyful, which bills itself as a social media newswire, the news editor, Malachy Browne, has written on the site’s **blog** about the company’s processes for validating social media posts: “Verification is a cornerstone of our work, and it has to be. Information and

content often spreads across social media in ‘Chinese whispers’ fashion. Videos and images are spliced, diced and re-posted. Context and details change, agendas compete. Falsehoods and fabrications are deliberately issued.”

Publications that seek to use content from social media should verify it first, Browne wrote. Had editors from ABC, NBC, *Time* and Fox followed his advice, they might not have published the viral YouTube video of a pig appearing to rescue a baby goat from a pond.

Find the original source of a video or image, if possible. Judge the reliability of the potential contributors as one would any other source or contributor. Do they live where the source of the material comes from? Do they tweet and post to Facebook regularly from this place? Use other sources such as **whitepages.com** to find out if

the contributors are listed. Call them. It's just good journalistic practice. "Social media is simply a new source for information that must be verified like any other," Browne wrote. He has additional techniques to verify that a photo or video is authentic, including geo-locators and satellite maps, but also some commonplace and practical methods: Compare weather conditions in a photo or video with weather reports from the day it was made. Check license plates to determine if they are from the right country and state. Look for anything that seems out of place or suspicious.

There are several instances of writers using Twitter to disclose plagiarized work. In a 2012 case, according to Mary C. Long, writing in **Mediabistro.com**, Josh Linker, an author, plagiarized the first couple of paragraphs of an article from an earlier blog by Chris Dixon. Long's story has screen grabs of Dixon's tweeting that Linker plagiarized his work and of Linker apologizing for it. But Twitter itself is not a reliable guard against plagiarism. According to its **help center page**, the service will not step into a dispute unless

the material in question is copyrighted.

Ultimately, detection must be part of the newsroom's larger work ethic, not an end unto itself. We are mindful of what Tom Rosenstiel cautioned in the aftermath of the Jayson Blair scandal. Rosenstiel, then the director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, questioned how much a newspaper can guard against willful fraud by deceitful reporters. "It's difficult to catch someone who is deliberately trying to deceive you," he said in an **interview with *The New York Times***. "There are risks if you create a system that is so suspicious of reporters in a newsroom that it can interfere with the relationship of creativity that you need in a newsroom — of the trust between reporters and editors."

## Creating a protocol

We urge every publication and website to develop a protocol for responding to reports of plagiarism or fabrication. In addition to dealing with the accused, an organization must be accountable to its audience, to its staff and contributors and to its own standards and those of the profession.

## The protocol should include a clear roadmap for taking action once plagiarism or fabrication is detected.

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A protocol must start with basics: As noted earlier, ethics codes should make it clear that plagiarism and fabrication are potential firing offenses. A primer on ethics should be given to new employees the day they start work and to new contributors once their work is accepted for publication.

The protocol should include a clear roadmap for taking action once plagiarism or fabrication is detected. Whom should the copy editor call when she spots a problem? Do outside contributors have a point person within the organization? Who is responsible for monitoring reader feedback, since some plagiarism and fabrication is noted on comments or social media? Is there an identifiable person responsible for handling complaints of plagiarism or fabrication?

Editors, managers and staff members should share case studies of plagiarism and fabrication at other outlets

as they occur, both as object lessons and as reinforcement for the principles of originality and attribution. We also recommend that staff members be required to review the ethics code annually. Some organizations ask them to sign a copy of the code each year, indicating that they understand it.

### Receiving the complaint

A senior staff member should be designated as the standards editor, with responsibility for investigating any plagiarism or fabrication charge. The assignment should be publicized and the public should be able to reach the standards editor easily. That editor should consider allegations of plagiarism or fabrication from anyone — other staff members, audience members, online forums, other publications or even the authors of plagiarized work.

When a complaint is received, the

standards editor should contact the supervisor of the department or unit that produced the suspect work. Both the standards editor and the supervisor should review the work and, in plagiarism cases, compare it to the original, looking for similarities and circumstances. This review should be both timely and thorough, aimed at determining as quickly as possible whether this is an isolated incident or part of a pattern.

Early on, the top newsroom executive should be alerted that a review is under way. The legal staff may also be consulted if there is a potential for suspension or dismissal or if copyright and liability issues come into play.

## Interviewing the suspect

Once plagiarism has been detected or fabrication surmised, two people (probably one of them the standards editor) should conduct the interview — in person if it is a staff member or by phone if the author is an outside contributor. We believe it is useful for news organizations to develop a script so that all the relevant questions are asked in one conversation. Here are some potential questions:

- Did you report this information yourself?
- Did you talk to the people quoted in the article? Can we see your notes and phone logs? Can you give us the addresses and phone numbers of these people?
- If you did not speak with them, how did you get the information?
- Did you see (the original work) before or during your reporting?
- Did you get background information from X publication? How did you use this material?
- These passages in your story appear to be similar to or the same as those in X publication. Can you explain how this happened?
- Did you travel for this story? Did you keep your travel receipts?
- Have you used these methods before?

It should be made clear during the interview that as the investigation unfolds the suspect's work will not be used, that previously published work

If plagiarism has been committed, the standards editor should notify the creator of the material about the transgression and explain the steps being taken to rectify the problem.

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may be examined and that the results of the investigation will be made public. The range of possible consequences should also be explained.

At the conclusion of the interview, the editors who conducted it should review their notes and advise the top newsroom executive of their findings.

If plagiarism has been committed, the standards editor should notify the creator of the material about the transgression and explain the steps being taken to rectify the problem. If the faulty work was by a freelancer, the contributor's contract should be reviewed and, perhaps, canceled.

Content on digital platforms must be reviewed and corrected. In some cases, the practice is to place the correction at the top of an archived or digital story, making it clear that a portion has been discredited and the

story has been revised. If the plagiarism or fabrication is total, the organization may not have a legal right to the content. In that case, the story should be taken down and replaced — at the same URL — with an explanation to readers.

### Assessing severity

Across the industry, there seems to be an understanding that, while fabrication leads inevitably to dismissal, not all plagiarism is created equal. There's the rookie journalist who regurgitates a news release without proper credit. There's the columnist whose work bears an uncanny resemblance to someone else's. And there's the Jayson Blair understudy who habitually lifts long passages from others and fabricates what he's missing.

Although some strident voices clamor for a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism — termination at first blush — that is not the norm. So the first step in crafting a policy about consequences or deciding how to respond to an individual act of plagiarism should be to choose between zero tolerance and a graduated scale of punishment.

Though a graduated scale is the norm, one must glean that from published accounts about infractions, rather than from organizations' policies. *The New York Times* policy, for example, defines plagiarism and says simply, "We will not tolerate such behavior." There's no mention of punishment. Policies that spell out consequences do so vaguely, as in *The Dallas Morning News*' policy, which says plagiarism "would lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination." *The Baltimore Sun*'s guidelines say, "It is a ground for dismissal." But none of the policies require termination. Employer discretion is the norm.

Organizations that choose a graduated scale of punishment should consider who will make the judgment using these factors:

- **Extent:** Was this a lifted sentence or an entire stolen article with only a changed byline?
- **Frequency:** Was this an isolated incident or habitual theft?
- **History:** Are there other ethical problems in this journalist's past?

And given the industry's increasing use of freelance contributors, media outlets may also want to consider whether to establish a separate graduated or zero-tolerance policy for them.

## Deciding on punishment

The consequences of plagiarism are as varied as the infractions, ranging from a verbal warning to dismissal. They may be subject to a hodgepodge of local, state and federal employment laws as well as union rules particular to individual shops. Given the individualized nature of each act of plagiarism and increased staffing demands, it's not surprising that no consensus on punishment has emerged.

Each organization is left to deal with the matter, which makes it all the more

important for each to develop its own guidelines. The available sanctions include oral or written reprimands, paid or unpaid suspensions, the loss of bylines, reassignments and forced resignations or dismissals. We believe that every organization should recognize plagiarism as a possible cause for termination and should make clear that fabrication always leads to dismissal.

In plagiarism cases there may be extenuating circumstances, but the punishment must be appropriate for a serious ethical breach: Slaps on the wrist do not deter further offenses or enhance the credibility of the organization or the industry.

If there is more than one instance of deception by a staff member, company policy may require a review by the human resources and legal departments because the investigation could lead to dismissal. It may even be necessary to hire outside investigators or researchers, particularly if the victim of plagiarism is a foreign publication.

And there is an alternate theory worth mentioning. In an article for Poynter, Scott Leadingham, the Society of Professional Journalists' director of

education, extolled **the merits of rehabilitation over excommunication**, “a kind of closely monitored work-release program for nonviolent offenders.” His hypothesis is that plagiarists have never absorbed the essence of journalism, and teaching and mentoring may be just what they and the industry need.

## Explaining the situation

Communicating with the rest of the staff after a plagiarism incident is important and may require a graduated approach. For example, different levels of detail may be given to managers or supervisors, to plagiarism-alert copy editors, assigning editors and news directors and to the staff at large.

Discussing a case with the staff may be easier when an employee is terminated than when a different punishment is chosen. The organization's human resources policies will be a guide on how much can be communicated. But newsroom managers should always be on the lookout for opportunities to remind the staff of the company's attribution and ethics guidelines.

If an offense is discovered before pub-

lication and the culprit is a staff member who will be suspended or dismissed, the incident may be made public. But if the offender is an outside contributor, the managers face a dilemma. The contributor may be barred from further work for the organization but continue working elsewhere. We were unable to decide whether an editor who discovers plagiarism or fabrication should share this information with other publications. Privacy concerns, due process and other legal considerations will make any organization cautious about labeling someone a thief when the material has not yet been published.

The publicity decision is easier if the offense is discovered after publication or broadcast. The editors would typically write a correction, clarification or editor's note, describing the problem, the investigation and its findings and apologizing for the error. In a serious case, they might distribute a staff memo. Circumstances would determine whether to name the offender. A culprit who is a contributor unfamiliar with the professional standards might not be named, though a staff member or professional probably would.

In the Poynter article **“How to handle plagiarism and fabrication allegations,”** Craig Silverman and Kelly McBride offered a helpful step-by-step guide to dealing with the public. Among their suggestions: Assign a single spokesperson to answer questions about the case and offer an explanation and apology in every medium in which the offender's work appeared.

Extremely serious cases may require more than a note to readers, listeners or viewers. *The New York Times* devoted four full pages to its account of Jayson Blair's fabrications and plagiarism in three dozen articles. In a broadcast setting, a news director or general manager could record an acknowledgment that would run during the news program that used improper material and post an announcement on the organization's website.

When the investigation is complete, the culprit has been punished and the apologies have been made, newsroom managers should review their policies and training procedures, asking themselves whether they can do more to prevent plagiarism and fabrication. ♦

## 5

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# Preparing *for* Tomorrow

**T**HE EFFORT to stamp out plagiarism and fabrication cannot be confined to the industry. It must be coordinated with news literacy programs not only in colleges but also in secondary schools. Students at all levels need to understand the importance of accurate, factual information, the value of sourcing and attribution and how news is gathered and disseminated.

In a 2011 study, the International Center for Academic Integrity found that 80 percent of college students surveyed said they had cheated at least once. In a cut-and-paste environment where Wikipedia and the concept of sharing are pervasive, journalism educators often face an uphill battle in ex-

plaining the evils of plagiarism. And as the Internet makes offenses easier to detect, they have struggled with how to handle plagiarism in their programs and in the university at large.

Some journalism schools have developed their own plagiarism definitions as part of their guidelines on academic integrity and journalism ethics. The **Academic Integrity Handbook** of the School of Journalism at the University of Arizona, for example, suggests that students attribute all of these items: a paraphrase of another person's spoken or written words; another person's ideas, opinions or theories; the source of any facts the reporter did not personally witness; the source of any statistics, graphs or

drawings; and accusatory, opinionated, unsubstantiated or controversial information, especially in crime or accident stories. The university also has strict rules against self-plagiarism.

But there is no universally accepted definition. The closest thing to it is in the Associated Collegiate Press's Model Code for Student Journalists, which says:

*“Plagiarism is prohibited and is illegal if the material is copyright protected. For the purposes of this code, plagiarism is defined as the word-for-word duplication of another person’s writing or close summarization of the work of another source without giving the source proper credit. A comparable prohibition applies to the use of graphics. Information obtained from a published work must be independently verified before it can be reported as a new, original story. This policy also forbids lifting verbatim paragraphs from a wire service without attribution or pointing out that wire stories were used in compiling the story. Material that is published on the Internet should be treated in the same way as if it were published*

*in more traditional broadcast media. Because plagiarism can significantly undermine the public trust of journalists and journalism, editors should be prepared to consider severe penalties for documented cases of plagiarism, including dismissal from the staff.”*

Regarding fabrication, the model code states:

*“The use of composite characters or imaginary situations or characters will not be allowed in news or feature stories. A columnist may, occasionally, use such an approach in developing a piece, but it must be clear to the reader that the person or situation is fictional and that the column is commentary and not reporting. The growth of narrative story development (storytelling devices) means that reporters and editors should be especially careful to not mix fact and fiction, and not embellish fact with fictional details, regardless of their significance.”*

Not all college or university publications are members of the Associated Collegiate Press, however, so many of them may not subscribe to or even

## We believe that a failure to attribute material properly in a first, beginning journalism class is a “teachable moment,” not a professional felony.

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know about the model code. The leaders of journalism education should therefore come together to create an omnibus code that specifically outlines students’ ethical responsibilities and clearly explains and prohibits plagiarism and fabrication.

With the code as a guideline, journalism educators can then find consensus on how to deal with plagiarists and fabricators using such sanctions as a reduced grade on the assignment, failing the assignment, failing the class, suspension and expulsion from the school.

We fully understand that finding the consensus we seek is no easy task because journalism programs operate within universities that vary widely in their treatment of plagiarism.

We recommend that other schools consider the one-strike policy in place at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at

Arizona State University. **The policy says:**

*“Any allegations of academic dishonesty will automatically be referred to the Standards Committee of the school for review and recommendation to the dean of the school. If any student is found by the committee to have engaged in academic dishonesty in any form — including but not limited to cheating, plagiarizing and fabricating — that student shall receive a grade of XE for the class and will be dismissed from the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. There will be no exceptions.”*

We believe, though, that a failure to attribute material properly in a first, beginning journalism class is a “teachable moment,” not a professional felony, and that journalism educators should teach — perhaps in a required

course — both the evils of plagiarism and fabrication and the importance of proper attribution.

Mary Kay Quinlan, associate professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, told this committee:

*“I think the proliferation of ‘stories’ that simply amount to regurgitating information compiled from other sources, especially from social media, make it difficult for people to understand exactly what plagiarism is.*

*“Also, the tendency to think that anything one finds online is free for the taking makes it increasingly difficult to convey a sense that there is such a thing as intellectual property rights.”*

The problem is made more complex with the proliferation of international graduate students who represent different cultures. Professor Jan Leach of Kent State University explained:

*“We have many grad students from China, and they simply have never encountered the concept. It is not in their educational background or cultural experience.”*

Nonetheless, by the time an undergraduate student is accepted into the journalism major, zero tolerance should apply. Zero tolerance at the university level is a powerful way to help change the professional culture.

This process of dealing with plagiarism and fabrication may be complicated by university policies stipulating that sanctions for integrity violations are handled outside individual departments. In such situations, it can be difficult for a faculty member to learn whether a student has been punished previously for plagiarism. A dean responsible for integrity matters may resist applying more serious sanctions to a journalism student than to one in another major. Here, we recommend that journalism deans and chairs educate their colleagues about the need for heightened integrity standards on plagiarism and fabrication for journalism students. No serial plagiarist should remain a journalism student in good standing.

There are two contexts in which student plagiarism or fabrication may occur. If the offense happens on an independent student publication, it should be reported immediately to the editor

in chief and promptly investigated by the editor in chief or a high-ranking supervisory editor or panel of editors. The accused student should be prohibited from writing for the publication until the issue is resolved. If plagiarism is detected, the publication should take the same steps suggested for professional publications.

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Every informed person,  
young or old, should  
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“Says who?”

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If the publication is produced in a laboratory setting — that is, as part of a journalism class — the editors would be involved, but the adviser of the organization or the faculty member who teaches the class may take the lead. If plagiarism is found, the offending student should be dealt with promptly.

In a classroom setting, student privacy must be considered. Information about sanctions may not be disclosed outside the core group of department members who need to know about

them. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act prohibits the public disclosure of academic records without the student’s permission. In 2008, a Texas A&M International University computer-science teacher was dismissed for violating the act in an attempt to thwart plagiarism, according to the online education site **Inside Higher Ed**. His offense was posting on his class blog the names of six students he had caught plagiarizing, saying their grade would be F.

Even before they reach college and even if they will never attend journalism school, young people need to be conscious of news literacy and the dangers of plagiarism and fabrication. Journalists should seek ways — perhaps in regular classroom visits — to help high school and middle school students understand how news is gathered and delivered.

We believe that students learning to teach English in middle schools and high schools should be required to take at least one journalism class that explains the dangers of plagiarism and fabrication.

In the end, every informed person, young or old, should be conditioned to ask: “Says who?” ♦

## 6

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# Participants



**STEVE BUTTRY** is director of community engagement and social media for Digital First Media and Journal Register Co. Before joining JRC and DFM, he was director of community engagement for TBD.com. From 2008 to 2010, he was at Gazette Communications in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as editor of *The Gazette* and *GazetteOnline* and C3 innovation coach. Buttry was named Editor of the Year in 2010 by *Editor & Publisher*. He has been an editor, reporter, writing coach, blogger and innovation coach for seven community and metro newspapers. Buttry has been an adjunct faculty member at Georgetown and American universities, was a contributor to the American Press Institute's Newspaper Next project and a frequent speaker at

conferences and seminars on journalism and the news business.



**MARIA CIANCI** has been a writer and editor on the web since 2000. Before that, she wrote about food and restaurants at newspapers and magazines. She is a managing editor at Yahoo! and was part of the core team of editors in the development of “The Yahoo! Style Guide: The ultimate sourcebook for writing, editing, and creating content for the digital world.”



**WILLIAM CONNOLLY** retired in 2001 as a senior editor of *The New York Times*, where his most recent assignments involved recruiting, training and the

development of a comprehensive policy on ethics and conflicts of interest. He is a co-author of “The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage, Revised and Expanded Edition” (Crown Publishers, 1999) and from 1987 through 1989 wrote “Winners & Sinners,” a periodical critique of the paper that circulated widely among journalists, writers and educators. He lectured frequently at the American Press Institute and taught from 1981 through 2001 at the Maynard Institute’s editing program, first at the University of Arizona, then at the University of California at Berkeley. He has also conducted workshops on editing for newspapers and for journalism schools and associations throughout the country. Before joining *The Times*, he served as a reporter or editor at *The Minneapolis Tribune*, *The Houston Chronicle* and *The Detroit Free Press*. From 1979 to 1983 he was managing editor of *The Virginian-Pilot*, the morning newspaper in Norfolk. He has been a member of the American Copy Editors Society since its inception, serving on its executive committee for 15 years, and is a past president of the ACES Education Fund.



**MIKE FARRELL** is an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Telecommunications at the University of Kentucky, where he teaches reporting, media law, journalism ethics and journalism history. He serves as the director of the Scripps Howard First Amendment Center. He is a member of the Society of Professional Journalists, serving on the Ethics Committee and the Freedom of Information Committee. For almost 20 years, he worked as a reporter, city editor and managing editor at *The Kentucky Post*. He is the co-author of “Newspapers: A Complete Guide to the Industry.” He earned his doctorate in communication at the University of Kentucky.



**ROGER FIDLER** is the program director for digital publishing and director of the Digital Publishing Alliance at the Missouri School of Journalism’s Reynolds Journalism Institute. Prior to joining the RJI in 2004 as its first fellow, he was a professor of journalism and in-

formation design at Kent State University. He worked in the newspaper business for 34 years in a variety of roles. Since 1979, when he was invited to join Knight-Ridder's pioneering videotex development team, he has been on the leading edge of new media developments. He is best known for his early vision of tablets, which Apple finally made real in the form of the iPad.



**PAM FINE** is the Knight Chair for News, Leadership and Community and a professor of journalism at the University of Kansas. She is treasurer of the American Society of News Editors (ASNE) and will be president of the organization in 2015. She is a former managing editor of the *Indianapolis Star* and the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis and assistant managing editor at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.



**STEVE FOX** joined the journalism faculty at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in August 2007 and has been work-

ing since then to incorporate multimedia across the curriculum. Since arriving at UMass, he has developed several courses modeled after his multimedia journalism class that allow students to work in teams in a newsroom-like environment where they develop packages — using social media, video, audio and photos to tell stories. He also developed the program's Sports Journalism Concentration. He has been a journalist for more than 25 years and has been involved with web journalism since the mid-1990s. He joined *The Washington Post's* website in 1996, just months after the site went live. He edited one of the first news blogs on the web and was involved in planning and editing multiple multimedia projects at *The Post*.



**HENRY FUHRMANN** is an assistant managing editor at *The Los Angeles Times*, where he oversees the copy desks and leads the editorial standards and practices committee. Since 1990 he has served all over the newsroom, working as an editor on the Metro, Foreign, Calendar, Business and web desks. He studied en-

gineering at Caltech and UCLA before entering the news business. Fuhrmann holds two degrees in journalism: a bachelor's degree from Cal State Los Angeles and a master's degree from Columbia University. He is active in the American Copy Editors Society and the Asian American Journalists Association.



**BOB HEISSE** is executive editor of *The State Journal-Register* in Springfield, Ill., and regional editor for GateHouse Media in Illinois. He is the immediate past president of the Associated Press Media Editors and is current president of the APME Foundation. Heisse joined the SJ-R in March 2012 after 10 years as executive editor of the *Centre Daily Times* in State College, Pa.



**MARGARET HOLT** is standards editor at the *Chicago Tribune*, working with reporters and editors on issues of accuracy, fairness and ethics. A member of the Native American Journalists Association, she has a particular interest in urban issues

and diversity of coverage and regularly meets with community leaders and groups to discuss coverage. Also, Holt has a background in training and staff development; she is a past chair of the Mid-America Press Institute and represents the *Tribune* on its board. Additionally, she works with colleagues at other Tribune Co. newsrooms on editorial ethics codes and practices.



**JAN LEACH** is an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Kent State University.

She teaches media ethics, newswriting, copy editing and more. She is director of Kent's Media Law Center for Ethics and Access and is an ethics fellow at the Poynter Institute. Leach is coordinator, host and facilitator for the annual Poynter KSU Media Ethics Workshop. Before joining the faculty at KSU, Leach was editor and vice president of *The Akron Beacon Journal* for five years. She came to Akron from *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, where she had been managing editor. She also was managing editor at *The Phoenix Ga-*

zette and city editor at *The Arizona Republic*, and held various reporting and editing positions at newspapers in Cincinnati, Findlay and Fostoria, Ohio.



**NORMAN P. LEWIS** is an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Florida. He joined the university in 2007 after earning his doctorate in journalism from the University of Maryland. Before that, he worked as a journalist for 25 years in jobs ranging from reporter to publisher and in locales ranging from small dailies to *The Washington Post*. His academic research focuses on ethics and plagiarism.



**TERESA SCHMEDDING** is the deputy managing editor/digital operations of the Daily Herald Media Group in suburban Chicago. She also is the president of the American Copy Editors Society. Schmedding has a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in media management from the University of Missouri-Columbia.



**NANCY A. SHARKEY** is a professor of practice in the School of Journalism at the University of Arizona. She spent more than 25 years in various editorial positions at *The New York Times*, and now teaches courses on reporting, editing and reporting public affairs. Sharkey also taught for more than 20 years as an adjunct professor in Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, from which she earned her master's degree. She is a member of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists and the Native American Journalists Association.



**TRAVIS SIEBRASS** is the assistant news editor/digital at *The Daily Herald* in suburban Chicago. A 2004 graduate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Siebrass has worked at *The Daily Herald* for the last eight years as a copy editor, designer and night desk manager.



**CRAIG SILVERMAN**, an adjunct faculty member at the Poynter Institute, is an award-winning journalist and the founder/editor of

Regret the Error, a blog that reports on media errors and corrections and trends regarding accuracy and verification. He writes a weekly column for *The Toronto Star* and has been a columnist for *Columbia Journalism Review*, *The Globe and Mail* and [BusinessJournalism.org](http://BusinessJournalism.org). He's the former managing editor of PBS MediaShift, and was part of the team that launched [OpenFile.ca](http://OpenFile.ca), a Canadian online news start-up.



**JIM SLUSHER** is assistant managing editor for opinion. He oversees the development of the editorial page and helps define

the editorial voice at *The Daily Herald*, a 130,000-circulation daily newspaper serving the west and northwest suburbs of Chicago. Slusher works closely with other newsroom managers to establish and monitor policies of the news operation, and he writes a weekly column to give insights into the decision-mak-

ing processes of the newsroom. Before assuming these duties, he worked for seven years supervising a team of senior reporters that developed investigative projects, cultural issues stories, coverage of major breaking news and enterprise stories on virtually all topics. And prior to that, he produced and supervised programs promoting an atmosphere of learning at all levels in *The Daily Herald's* 290-person newsroom. He has led workshops on journalism and newsroom leadership for various regional and national organizations, including the Inland Press Association and the American Copy Editors Society. He joined *The Daily Herald* in 1989 as news editor. In 1992, he became associate editor, expanding his oversight of production issues and increasing his role in newsroom operations. He assumed his present position in 2010. A 1974 graduate of Western Illinois University, Slusher also taught high school for two years in the mid-'70s, served as news director of a small Iowa radio station and has worked in all newsroom capacities at newspapers in northwestern Illinois, Michigan and California.



**DYLAN SMITH** is the editor and publisher of TucsonSentinel.com, a nonprofit local independent online news organization. He is the chairman of the board of the Local Independent Online News Publishers (LION), which represents the publishers of more than 100 local news sites across the country. An experienced designer and programmer, he serves as an invited expert on the World Wide web Consortium's HTML Working Group, helping to write the latest specifications for the language that runs the Internet. Prior to founding the Sentinel, he was the online editor for *The Tucson Citizen* until the newspaper was shut down. He was the executive director of The Quintessential Stage, a nonprofit theater company, and editor and publisher of *¿K? Magazine*, an arts and culture monthly, in the 1990s. He comes from a long line of journalists; his great-grandfather began work as a reporter fresh from high school in 1900. His family operated *The Wheaton (Ill.) Daily Journal* for more than 50 years. His grandfather was an editor as well as a journalism professor, his grandmother was a copyeditor and

typesetter, and his parents published an alternative newspaper in the 1960s.



**PATRICK SMITH** is an online editor at *The Omaha World-Herald* in Nebraska. He previously worked as an online editor at *The Lincoln Journal Star* and a copy editor at the Stelter Co. and *The Des Moines Register*. He has been an ACES member for nearly a decade and graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



**NICOLE STOCKDALE** is the assistant editorial page editor for *The Dallas Morning News* and editor of the Sunday opinion section, *Points*. She joined the editorial board in 2006 after seven years as a news copy editor at *The Morning News* and *The Wichita Eagle*.



**DAVID SWARTZLANDER** is an assistant professor of journalism and the Journalism Department chairman at Doane College in

Nebraska. He also is the president of the College Media Association. Swartzlander has 14 years of experience as a professor at Doane, teaching journalism and advising the student newspaper, yearbook and news website. He has 23 years of experience as a reporter for five dailies in four states, Ohio, Florida, New York and Nebraska. He earned his master's degree in journalism from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



**AMY TARDIF** is station manager and news director at WGCU FM in Southwest Florida. She oversees a staff of six in news, production and the radio reading service. Her program “Lucia’s Letter,” on human trafficking, received a Peabody Award, an Edward R. Murrow Award, a gold medal from the New York Festivals and first place for Best Documentary from the Public Radio News Directors Inc. She was the producer and host of “Gulf Coast Live Arts Edition” for eight years and spent 14 years as WGCU’s local host of NPR’s “Morning Edition.” She serves as the Region 13 representative on the RTD-

NA Board of Directors. She also served on the Editorial Integrity for Public Media Project helping to write the section on employees’ activities beyond their public media work.



**FARA WARNER** is editorial director, business, technology and entertainment group, at AOL, where she oversees the editorial content and direction of brands. She was the past editorial director of *Newsweek Daily Beast* and has taught journalism at the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. Warner is the author of “The Power of the Purse. How Smart Companies Are Adapting to the World’s Most Important Consumers — Women” and a freelance journalist. She has 15 years of experience writing for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Fast Company*, *Brandweek* and the Associated Press.



**MARK WILLIS** serves as a journalist with Sirius-XM Satellite Radio. Willis, who has more than 30 years of experience in the

news media, has interviewed presidents, sports celebrities and maybe even your neighbor. He has worked as an anchor at KRLD in Dallas and the Texas State Network. He was also news director for the ABC Radio Networks in Dallas. Willis currently serves as the Region 6 Coordinator for the Radio and Television Digital News Association.



**STACEY WOELFEL** is an associate professor at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and the news director for KOMU-TV, the university-owned NBC affiliate for central Missouri. The commercial station serves as the teaching laboratory for the School of Journalism. Woelfel is a frequent instructor in free media practices for journalists worldwide, having taught working journalists multiple times in China, Croatia, Mexico, Moldov and Montenegro. His focus is on sharing current trends and best practices to reach audiences more effectively. He was the national chairman of the Radio Television Digital News Foundation and the Radio Television Digital News Association; was a member of the

association's Executive Committee; has served as the chair of the ethics committee and as a member of the convention planning and education committees. He is also a member of the board of governors of the Mid-America chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Woelfel is a winner of the Payne Award for Ethics in Journalism, the Emmy, the Edward R. Murrow and numerous regional and local awards. He is the author of "Suspicious Signs: Effects of Newscaster Scripts, Symbols and Actions on Audience Perceptions of News Organization Bias" and wrote a chapter in "Silenced: International Journalists Expose Media Censorship." He holds a doctorate in political science.



**KENT ZELAS** is a blog editor with the AOL Huffington Post Media Group. He was previously with the Pew Charitable Trusts; *The Los Angeles Times*, where he was the assistant readers' representative, news editor, copy editor and page designer; and *The Orange County Register*, where he was a wire editor and copy editor. ♦

## 7

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# Notable Incidents

Adapted in part from “The Summer of Sin Chronology” by Craig Silverman

## January 2013

*The Toronto Star* suffered two plagiarism cases in a week. One article included material lifted from a *Globe and Mail* report. The other was an op-ed piece submitted by a Toronto school official. *The Star* apologized to readers and said it would begin using plagiarism-detection software.

## December 2012

A veteran *Cape Cod Times* reporter, Karen Jeffrey, was exposed as a serial fabricator. The paper’s editor and

publisher said that editors had been unable to find 69 people in 34 stories published since 1998. When confronted, Jeffrey confessed to fabricating people and quotes.



*The Summit Daily News* in Colorado apologized to its readers for a Dec. 23 article that was nearly identical to one on *The Summit Business Journal*’s website. Calling the incident “a deliberate act of plagiarism,” the paper said, “We do not tolerate such actions and we have taken steps to ensure such behavior is not repeated in the future.”

## November 2012

A *Hartford Courant* reporter, Hillary Federico, resigned after the paper found in two of her stories “words or phrases that bear strong similarities to work that appeared in other publications.”

## October 2012

A writer for Penn State’s *The Daily Collegian* was suspended after one of his articles was found to contain fabricated quotes and plagiarized material.

## September 2012

*The East Valley Tribune* in Arizona announced that an intern from Arizona State University had plagiarized several articles while working at the paper. The Arizona State student paper, *The State Press*, said it had discovered plagiarism by a contributor who also worked at *The East Valley Tribune*.



*The Spectator*, the student paper at Columbia University, announced that an article by Jade Bonacolta had included passages from *The New York Times*. She also fabricated a quote. A subsequent

examination by Poynter’s Andrew Beaujon found another example of theft.



*The Sydney Morning Herald* suspended, then fired a columnist, Tanveer Ahmed, after he was exposed as a serial plagiarist in a report by Media Watch. Ahmed later published a column in *The Australian* apologizing for his plagiarism, adding: “The reality is dawning upon me that I’ve been a plagiarist for the past couple of years. I didn’t know the extent of the problem.”



*The Globe and Mail* suspended Margaret Wente after finding plagiarism in a column she wrote. The paper’s editor said the column “did not meet the standards of *The Globe and Mail* in terms of sourcing, use of quotation marks and reasonable credit for the work of others.”

## August 2012

Fareed Zakaria, the CNN host and *Time* magazine editor, confessed to plagiarizing two paragraphs from the *New Yorker* writer Jill Lepore in a column for *Time*. He apologized. *Time* and CNN both suspended him and

reviewed his work, finding no further problems.



A *Boston Globe* editorial was partly plagiarized from an article published by WBUR, an NPR affiliate. The paper refused to identify the author or discuss disciplinary action.



Jim Romenesko reported that a *Nevada Appeal* column by Bob Thomas included material taken from an Internet essay.

## July 2012

NPR admitted that an intern's account of an execution in Afghanistan included plagiarized material.



Tamara Bell, a staff photographer, was fired by *The Pioneer Press* after she repeatedly fabricated material for photo essays. The paper said it was strengthening its ethics training and adopting a photo-checking system.



Deadspin reported that an ESPN writer, Lynn Hoppes, had plagiarized from Wikipedia on numerous occasions. The plagiarized pieces were not

removed from ESPN.com until December, when ESPN's vice president and executive editor, John Walsh, was questioned about Hoppes during a visit to a journalism class.

## June 2012

A whistleblower disclosed that hundreds of stories produced by Journatic, an "outsourcing" company, bore fake bylines and, in at least one case, plagiarized material and fabricated information.



*The New Canaan News* in Connecticut fired a staff writer, Pares Jha, after discovering that he'd fabricated sources in at least 25 stories.



Jonah Lehrer, the *New Yorker* staff writer, *Wired* contributor and best-selling author, repeatedly recycled passages in blog posts, fabricated material in at least one book and plagiarized material from multiple sources. Lehrer resigned from *The New Yorker* after it was revealed that he had fabricated quotes from Bob Dylan in his book "Imagine." *Wired* later severed ties with him.



*The Wall Street Journal* dismissed Liane Membis, an intern, after learning that she had fabricated sources and quotes in three articles. *The Huffington Post* later removed a contribution from her because of fabrication, and she was said to have had problems with accuracy while at *The Yale Daily News*.



Michael Norman, a journalism professor at New York University, discovered that a syndicated Oliver North column included a passage from Norman's 1990 book "These Good Men: Friendships Forged in War." The plagiarized material was removed from the online column.



*The Poughkeepsie Journal* apologized to *The Daily Freeman* of Kingston, N.Y., for lifting material from a story about a proposed tuition hike.

## May 2012

Salon.com and Erik Wemple of *The Washington Post* both presented evidence that Arnaud de Borchgrave, a *Washington Times* columnist and director and senior adviser of the Center for Strategic and International Stud-

ies, had plagiarized from the AP and ClickZ.com, among other sources. The paper announced that de Borchgrave would take a leave of absence.

## April 2012

*The Contra Costa Times* apologized to *The Los Angeles Times* after discovering that an editorial published in early April was "nearly identical" in its "approach" to one previously published in Los Angeles.



A *Washington Post* reporter, Elizabeth Flock, resigned after an editor's note said one of her blog posts "made inappropriate, extensive use of an original report by *Discovery News* and also failed to credit that news organization as the primary source for the blog post."



*The Reporter*, a magazine published at the Rochester Institute of Technology, fired three writers after discovering plagiarism in two articles.

## March 2012

*The Sentry*, a weekly in South Portland-Cape Elizabeth, Me., fired a reporter, Michael J. Tobin, for plagiarizing from two competing papers, *The Forecaster*

and *Current*. Tobin also wrote about a local council meeting as if he'd been there when he had not.



A writer for *The Colonnade*, a student newspaper at Georgia College & State University, was dismissed after plagiarizing from the Associated Press.



*The Gazette* of Montreal fired Paul Carbray, a longtime soccer columnist and former copy editor, after discovering that he had repeatedly plagiarized.



Jon Flatland, a columnist and former president of the North Dakota Newspaper Association, was exposed as a serial plagiarist. Dave Fox, the writer who exposed Flatland, estimated that “80 to 90 percent” of his columns included stolen material.



Steve Jeffrey, the publisher and editor of the *Anchor Weekly* in Chestermere, Alberta, plagiarized a significant portion of his “Sittin’ in the Lighthouse” columns. George Waters, who exposed the plagiarism, said he’d identified stolen material in 42 of the 52 columns he’d looked at. Jeffrey initially

denied the accusation, then issued an apology.

## February 2012

A story on FoxNews.com included passages lifted from The Atlantic Wire. The site added an editor’s note about the plagiarism and offered an apology.

## January 2012

*The Fairfield Minuteman* in Connecticut fired its sports editor, Eric Montgomery, after he plagiarized from two competing papers.

## June 2011

*The Chicago Sun-Times* fired Paige Wisner after she wrote a “Glee Live!” concert review that included details about a song that was not performed and a song that she did not stay at the concert long enough to hear.



*The Denver Post* discovered that Woody Paige, the sports columnist, had plagiarized quotes from a *Sports-Business Journal* article. *The Post* ran a correction and added a note to the column saying that it had been updated to include an attribution.

## March 2011

*The Washington Post* suspended Sari Horwitz for plagiarizing parts of a story about the shooting of Gabrielle Giffords, the Arizona Congresswoman. The paper apologized, and so did Horwitz, saying: “Under the pressure of tight deadlines, I did something I have never done in my entire career. I used another newspaper’s work as if it were my own. It was wrong. It was inexcusable.”

## January 2011

*The Village Voice* severed ties with a freelance writer, Rob Sgobbo, after it discovered that he had fabricated characters for a story about for-profit colleges. *The New York Daily News* also terminated its relationship with him.



ESPN suspended Will Selva for lifting parts of a newspaper column and using them in a script.

## Earlier Incidents

2009 Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times* plagiarized a paragraph from the blog of Josh Marshall, the Talking Points Memo editor. Dowd’s column was up-

dated with a reference to Marshall and a note about the lack of proper attribution.



2005 Mitch Albom, the radio and TV personality and a sports columnist for *The Detroit Free Press*, wrote a column that made it seem as though he had attended a Final Four basketball game when he had not. Albom said two former college players were there, though they did not attend the game. Albom was briefly suspended



2004 Jack Kelley fabricated parts of at least eight major stories in *USA Today*. The paper conducted an internal investigation and Kelley resigned.



2003 Jayson Blair of *The New York Times* plagiarized material from other news organizations, used phony datelines and fabricated quotes. He resigned. *The Times* ran a front-page and filled four inside pages with its account of the scandal, calling it “a profound betrayal of trust and a low point in the 152-year history of the newspaper.”



1998 Mike Barnicle of *The Boston Globe* plagiarized jokes from “Brain

Droppings,” a book by the comedian George Carlin. *The Globe* suspended him, then asked him to resign.



1998 Patricia Smith, also of *The Boston Globe*, was forced to resign after it was discovered that she had made up characters in her columns. ASNE rescinded her 1998 award for distinguished writing, though none of the columns that won were found to contain fabricated material.



1998 Stephen Glass fabricated more

than 25 stories for *The New Republic*, *George* magazine and *Rolling Stone*. Glass was fired from *The New Republic* after *Forbes* reported that he had fabricated a story called “Hack Heaven.”



1980 Janet Cooke wrote a sensational account about an 8-year-old heroin addict for *The Washington Post*. After months of controversy, the story won a Pulitzer Prize. But it turned out to be untrue. Cooke resigned and was stripped of the prize.



## rji donald w. reynolds journalism institute

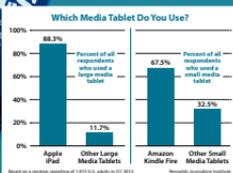
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## 8

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# What *They're* Saying

“With rapid advances in technology and many challenges facing newsrooms, along with many new ‘information providers,’ a focus on best guidelines and practices has become critical to our industry.”

**Brad Dennison**

President, Large Daily Division, GateHouse Media Inc.  
President, Associated Press Media Editors

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“Plagiarism and fabrication undermine the credibility of all professional journalists. And readers need credible information more than ever with the cacophony of voices on the Internet, some of which are masquerading as journalism.”

**Teresa Schmedding**

Deputy Managing Editor, Daily Herald Media Group  
President, American Copy Editors Society

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“The foundation of journalism is the trust between reporter and reader. Plagiarism and fabrication break that bond.”

**Dylan Smith**

Editor and publisher, TucsonSentinel.com  
Chairman, Local Independent Online News Publishers

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“Incidents of plagiarism hurt the credibility not only of the guilty journalist, but of our entire profession. It’s great to see this important issue addressed by the industry.”

**Vincent Duffy**

News director, Michigan Radio  
Chairman, Radio Television Digital News Association

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“Transparency and accountability are important to journalism, regardless of the media or audience. This includes being honest about the source of what we include in our work.”

**Hugo Rodrigues**

Multimedia journalist, The Expositor, Brantford, Ontario  
President, Canadian Association of Journalists

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“Questions about what is true and what is fabricated, and what is an original source or what might be plagiarized, have become vital to our craft. Our ethical standards must be upheld and adapted as our way of communicating evolves.”

**Paul Cheung**

Global interactive editor, Associated Press  
President, Asian American Journalists Association

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“In today’s turbulent marketplace, journalists and news organizations prove our value by providing original, truthful work. Plagiarism and fabrication damage the credibility of innocent journalists and news organizations and betray our readers and viewers.”

**Jim Brady**

Editor in chief, Digital First Media  
President, Online News Association

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# Sources

Hyperlinks to web pages are shown below as blue underlined text. To return to the related page in the text, touch or click on the page number to the left of the link. In Chapters 1 through 5, words or phrases in bold indicate links. To move from the text to the appropriate page of links, touch or click on the **SHOW SOURCES** button at the bottom of the text page.

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- 22** [JimRomenesko.com](#) — questioned by Jim Romenesko
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- 34 [JimRomenesko.com](#) — Jim Romenesko, who covers the media
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